

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE TWO KINGDOMS

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Contemporary man is suffering from a type of historical amnesia, a condition which is partially the result of a pathetic attempt to live entirely in the "specious present." In the *Future of Man*, Teilhard de Chardin accurately assigns to history its role in human knowledge:

It is clear in the first place that the world in its present state is the outcome of movement. Whether we consider the rocky layers enveloping the Earth, the arrangement of the forms of life that inhabit it, the variety of civilizations to which it has given birth, or the structure of languages spoken upon it, we are forced to the same conclusion: that everything is the sum of the past and that nothing is comprehensible except through its history.¹

As an historian of western religious thought, this is where I stand. In this essay I ask you to struggle with me through an attempt to understand what Luther, the renovator, had to say about the social order and what this might imply for our "specious present."

The Sitz im Leben of Luther's Two-Kingdoms Doctrine

Religious history cannot afford to neglect the political, social, and economic factors of a particular historical situation. To assess adequately the contextual fabric of Luther's Germany we must devote some time to elaborating, or at least enumerating, such factors.

The process of the development of the territorial state was well under way in western Europe by 1500.² It was led by princes, both ecclesiastical and lay, and frequently in opposition to the cities. They retained control of the imperial Diet and at the same time established police powers with uniform justice,

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Future of Man*, trans. by Norman Denny (London, 1964), p. 12.

² Cf. Harold Grimm, "Social Forces in the German Reformation," *Church History*, 31 (March, 1962), 3-13.

